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THE VIENNA EXHIBITION IN CONNEXION WITH ART-INDUSTRY.

BY JACOB FALKE.*

II. CARPETS AND DECORATIVE STUFFS.

As the productions of textile art seem to present us with the greatest facilities for observation, we select them for the first subjects of our remarks. And we must here, once for all, request our readers to remember that it is not our purpose to give a description of individual productions, which the immense proportions of the exhibition, as well as our allotted space, entirely preclude, but simply to notice the general characteristics which predominate, or claim our attention as novel; and we trust that in this we shall be found to have done justice, if not to every exhibitor, at least to every country.

As is the case with all other productions, so with all those which come under the denomination of textile art, they are found scattered about in all parts of this complex building. When, with assistance of stout limbs and a good memory, the brain has formed a picture of what is exhibited in this province of art, it finds a physiognomy entirely different from that which it remembers in the Paris exhibition. The fact that the East has now entered on the scene to a hitherto unprecedented extent, that her art is peculiarly a decorative one, and that it finds its most extensive and most important application in her textile fabrics, places here before us two worlds equally well appointed in this branch of industry, whereas in Paris, the East played only the part of an episode or an *entre-acte*. Nay, more, in this most important province of art, the East has not only penetrated most deeply

into the spirit of the West, but now almost reigns supreme over it.

This is perhaps not so much the case with regard to France, who, notwithstanding the great changes which have befallen her since 1867, has remained more faithful to her artistic nature, than we might have expected. It is true that we meet, here and there, traces of the East in her textiles, but in her carpets and still more in her other decorative stuffs, she has retained specifically French characteristics. The large naturalistically treated flower patterns have indeed been abandoned, but instead of them the style Louis XV. seems to be that which makes the most especial pretension to Art. Two immense carpets by Braquené brothers are the chief specimens of this branch of Art-Industry and display very great skill and art, but at the same time are not in good taste. Their architectonic arrangement and ornamentation, their gold coloured rosettes, their shells, portrait-medallions and plastic looking borders, produce the effect of painted ceilings transferred into coloured wools and laid over the floor. We do not wonder at the question being asked, in undisguised astonishment, if these carpets were really ever intended to be laid down for feet to tread upon.

Very different is the character of the English carpets. In view of these various and for the most part faultless works, we must at last cease to speak of English want of taste. The advance, and indeed the revolution in taste within the last ten years with respect to this branch of art is complete, for it cannot be denied that in the London carpet exhibition, there were many

* Continued from page 115 *ante*.

failures and worthless productions. Now, however, there is no trace to be found in the larger carpets of those wonderful conglomerations of forest and garden, which formerly charmed the British public in the chamber of horrors of the Manchester-house Museum; only the smallest kind, namely the hearthrugs still seem hopelessly to cling to the old style. The worst specimens are those of the house of Widnall in Lasswade, near Edinburgh, in which are not only giant nosegays and landscapes, but all kinds of genre pictures, hunting parties, scenes from India and Arabia; and even romance has its unnatural representations, nor, alas, can it be said that these are mere exceptions.

In the larger carpets, on the contrary, there reigns a decidedly artistic purpose, with a preponderating adoption of oriental motives. There are many separate productions of this kind, in which bouquets of modest dimension in regular intervals are distributed over the surface, or with a similar arrangement to that we have already noticed by Braquené brothers in the style Louis XV., but rather more quiet. One very remarkable specimen of this kind is exhibited by Templeton, of Glasgow and London. More frequently, however, we meet with carpets having corner ornaments and broad borders, with a rich centre pattern on a plain ground of one colour only. But most numerous are those stuffs, which are direct imitations of the oriental patterns, and here it is especially the style of India and Persia in contrast to that of Turkey, that has served for model.

The carpets exhibited by the Austrian manufacturers are also decidedly oriental in character; one firm, that of Philip Haas and Sons, stands at the head of this department. No one else has so intelligently and so energetically adapted oriental taste to present ideas, and understood the position of Vienna with regard to this "Oriental question". No other manufactories have any pretension to an independent taste. If they follow in the same direction, it is merely because they find themselves obliged to do so, and almost all their oriental patterns suffer from too glaring colours. Such specimens however, as one which we noticed from the house of Joseph Dierzer, with gigantic flowers between extravagant, wild and heavy ornaments, are happily rare exceptions.

The case is not very different with Belgium, Holland and Germany, which still are among the countries which put in an appearance in the European competition. There are some large and successful specimens from Deventer and Delft, though the colouring is rather too glaring: a quality which is also prevalent among the Belgian productions, though we can point to no one piece of peculiar beauty or importance; and the best of the German works (Gevers and Schmidt of Schmiedeberg in Silesia) belong to the oriental style. In comparison with these, the varicoloured and unmeaning carpets of Leop. Schöller and Sons in Düren must be considered as failures. It must be remarked also that the German, Dutch and Belgian carpets belong especially to the Smyrna style, and not to the Indo-Persian.

As for the East itself, so rich and perfect is its exhibition of carpetry that we scarcely miss one single im-

portant or characteristic kind. From Morocco to Turkestan, from the Danube to India, all are represented, and especially must we feel grateful to Turkey for having given so prominent a place to her Asiatic provinces. The utmost variety of carpets, covers, portières clothe the walls and entrances, and cover the entire ceiling of her compartment. Had there been a catalogue or labels, the want of which is much to be regretted, we might have been in a position to give a somewhat detailed account of this leading branch of oriental industry from an artistic point of view; as it is, we must content ourselves with a few remarks upon it.

There are three principal groups into which these oriental textile fabrics may generally be divided. The best known to us, and the most usually imitated in our own manufactories, is that known as the Smyrna. Its peculiarity consists in a kind of regular disposition of decoration, uniting a centre ornament with cornerpieces and a broad border, while the ground is plain; which is an arrangement particularly congenial to European taste. The design is irregular and capricious in the highest degree, and serves only to bring the colours confusedly together, green and red being predominant. In contrast to this is the Indo-Persian carpetry, which is not distinguished by irregularity of detail or any definite arrangement, but rather by a delicacy of design in which flowers regularly drawn, or strongly conventionalised are the chief motive, and are so thickly repeated over the whole surface at regular intervals, that at a little distance they produce the effect of colour similar to that of watered silk. There is also a border of more or less rich design. The third kind, which, on the whole, is the production of the less civilised people of the East, occupies a middle position between the other two: the ornamental motive consists of an apparently regular, but in reality an unsymmetrical pattern, of straight lines, small triangular or square figures, which being of different colours impart a gay and pleasant effect to the whole surface. There are many such specimens, more or less successful, more or less delicately treated, leaning also, for the most part, either to the Smyrna or the Indo-Persian principle.

Another kind of carpet, which we must not omit to mention, has a great resemblance to this latter species, namely the woven stuffs of the Slave nations, especially those of the South, from the countries on the Danube, and from Dalmatia, Roumania and Greece. They show the same irregular geometrical patterns, but are gayer and more glaring in colour, particularly by the predominance of yellow and green. The richest and most characteristic specimens are of Grecian workmanship.

Entirely different from the carpetry is the physiognomy of the other materials for domestic decorations, such as the covers for furniture and coloured curtains; it is like entering into another world. While the carpets show throughout the tendency to orientalism, and are almost entirely dominated by it, we recognise in these stuffs an increasing inclination to the Renaissance, or to the beautiful patterns of mediæval times. The imitation

of the East plays here a very unimportant part, and with here and there an isolated exception, is confined to printed cretons and Bouvette stuffs, especially from Alsace which certainly has produced many very beautiful specimens. From among them we select for special notice the goldbrocades from the two Crefeld manufactories of Meckel and Gebhard, imitations of Indian and partly of Chinese stuffs. Since the Paris exhibition we have often had occasion to call attention to these wonderful Indian textile fabrics, and are pleased to have met here with a decided improvement, though these imitations are, according to our ideas, too much modernised, partly by the choice of colours and partly by the intermixture of Indian palm-leaves with naturalistic flowers. In Austria two manufactories have equally well applied or imitated these Indian motives. What the French have done in this direction, is rather to be seen in the desire to introduce something new and bizarre into the market, than in any evidence of true taste and intelligence of their beauty. What the East itself has exhibited in such decorative materials, is but unimportant as to quantity, in comparison with what we might expect, in regard to those peculiar carpets which are so well known as portières and coverings for divans. Here China, and Japan especially, come out in great force; the latter, by the surprising extent of her exposition of silks, compensates for the inferiority of the rest of the East. The designs of her ornaments strike us indeed as for the most part bizarre, but the effect is always good and suggestive, and in her shades of colour there is much of which our modern colourists have not yet thought of. India has also brought her red, gold bordered, or gold brocaded silks, but we do not see such splendid specimens as were exhibited in London and Paris; and among the flowered cotton prints, of which there is a considerable number both in the Indian and Persian compartment, there is nothing of any striking beauty, with the exception of one Indian curtain, in which variegated flowers are raised on a richly printed ground of gold.

The European states which show to the greatest advantage in their decorative stuffs are France, England and Austria; next to them are Germany, Italy and Russia; Spain also displays in a certain degree an originality of design. France who has turned to good account the many new tendencies which have cropped up in the last few years, without at the same time departing from her old traditions, unites in her own exposition the peculiarities of the whole modern European manufacture in this province. More than ever, and in decided increase are to be seen in her department the patterns of the Renaissance, and wonderful imitations of the ancient Genoese and Venetian velvets and silks, still harmonising with the old French genius, not destitute of the bizarre element, inasmuch as, for example, those patterns, whose effect depends upon a certain grandeur of proportion between the ornament and the ground, are at times so extraordinarily magnified that their effect is rather awkwardly changed. Next to the Renaissance patterns are seen in greatly preponderating numbers the different kinds of ornamentation of the eighteenth century on

stuffs of all sorts, silks and velvets, woollen and printed cottons, all showing signs of the same exaggeration and caprice, the graceful scroll ornaments on the prints, for example, having grown into trees. We cannot but see that the genius of France has remained in principle true to itself; nor is it less certain that she has shown numerous extraordinarily beautiful objects of this kind. Through this steadfastness and conservatism of the French mind, the Gobelins, which, notwithstanding the absence of the formerly royal manufacture, are still far from being an unimportant feature in the exhibition, retain their old character, their good and their bad. They are always admirable as imitations of pictures when we consider them from this standpoint and remember their manufacture, but they are no less obsolete when they represent gardens with trees, landscapes with temples, rocks and lakes, or when with figures they are used to cover sofas and armchairs in spite of all the curvatures. Nor are the middle ages forgotten in the French tapestry, and Lyons, the super-modern Lyons, does them special homage, particularly in the ecclesiastical department.

In contrast to the variety of France, England may appear monotonous, but by no means to her disadvantage, for her monotony is an evidence of a decidedly artistic intention, rather than, as with France, of a desire to comply with fashion. In the English woven stuffs, which we are now speaking of, the conventionalised design is ever predominant with a leaning more to the style of the sixteenth century than to that of the middle ages, and among them there is much beautiful workmanship of grand effect. Some few, but these are rare exceptions, such as the striking exhibition of silks by Pim brothers, indicate French influence and the style of the eighteenth century. On the other hand, in the rich Italian silks, all is modern and according to French ideas, and Italy seems here to be treading in the footsteps of France, whereas in those departments, where she adheres to her own past traditions, she is entirely triumphant. Russia also is modern as to the great mass of her silk-stuffs, and even with less delicacy of treatment than Italy, though some of her specimens, those for example which imitate mediæval or Byzantine designs must be distinguished from the generality as worthy of great praise.

The Spanish textile fabrics are of a very mixed character: articles of the most ordinary kind, and of almost entirely antiquated style, stand side by side with the original Spanish stuffs for covers, portières &c., which by their charming colours claim the very first rank. Germany puts forth some tentative efforts in this department, and this is just the more apparent in proportion as her textile productions are more pretentious and more numerous. Doubtless there is much that is good among them, but they come before us for the most part in very unsatisfactory arrangement and generally in very unworthy company. In other departments of art also we shall meet with the same uncertainty of taste in Germany.

Very different is the judgement to be pronounced on Austria, and especially in this department. For though we shall certainly find a number of Austrian manufactures

in the exhibition, which slavishly follow the French patterns, still we must acknowledge that, compelled by the prevailing taste of the public, they have selected out of these the severer and more conventionalised designs and thus place themselves in harmony with the predominant tendency of Austrian Art-industry. This tendency, which owes its origin to the Austrian museum and which is fostered and supported by its every possible means, which seeks to produce that which is genuine art, that which is absolutely beautiful, and not merely considered so because of the shifting fashion of the day, finds already very worthy representatives. In this branch of art we must name Gian as the first who paid homage to this

tendency, but at present we must again point to the before mentioned manufactory of Haas and Son which, assisted by the eminent decorative talent of Storck, pursues the new course with such energy and successful results, that it must perforce carry the fashion and the general public along with it. Their admirable works are an indubitable proof that there is at present no similar manufactory in the whole world which can approach it in extent, variety, richness and beauty; but competition will soon be a necessary and spontaneous consequence of such preeminence. We shall have similar remarks to make upon other branches of Austrian Art-industry.

(To be continued in our next.)

SPECIMENS OF ORNAMENTATION.



No. 1. Grecian. Painted Ornament on Vase.